

FREE LIBRARY OF PHILADELPHIA, PASSYUNK BRANCH
(Free Library of Philadelphia, Thomas F. Donatucci Sr. Branch)
1935 Shunk Street
Philadelphia
Philadelphia
Pennsylvania

HABS PA-6762
PA-6762

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

FREE LIBRARY OF PHILADELPHIA, PASSYUNK BRANCH (Free Library of Philadelphia, Thomas F. Donatucci, Sr. Branch Library)

HABS NO. PA- 6762

- Location: 1935 Shunk Street at the corner of Twentieth Street, South Philadelphia, Philadelphia County, Pennsylvania. The library faces southwest onto Shunk Street and is surrounded by mostly turn-of-the-century duplex housing.
- Owner: The library is part of the Free Library of Philadelphia system and is owned by the City of Philadelphia.
- Present Use: Branch library.
- Significance: When the cornerstone of the Passyunk Branch of the Free Library of Philadelphia was laid in 1913, it was one of seven branches concurrently under construction through an endowment from industrialist-turned-philanthropist Andrew Carnegie. The impact of Carnegie's grant program on the development of public libraries cannot be overstated. He came of age in an era when libraries were rare, privately funded institutions and access was through subscription. Believing in the power of libraries to create an egalitarian society that favored hard work over social privilege by allowing for equal access to knowledge, between 1886 and 1917 he provided forty million dollars for the construction of 1,679 libraries throughout the nation. The vast resources that he allotted to library research and construction contributed significantly to the development of the American Library as a building type. In addition, by insisting that municipalities supply a building site, books, and annual maintenance funds before bestowing grants Carnegie elevated libraries from the arena of private philanthropy to that of civic responsibility.
- Philadelphia was the recipient of one of the largest Carnegie grants for library construction. Although the city was among the first to establish a free library system, it had no purpose-built structures prior to the Carnegie endowment. Under the direction of the city's appointed Carnegie Fund Committee, the branch libraries were built between 1905 and 1930 and designed by a "who's-who" of Philadelphia's architects. The twenty extant branch libraries remain as a remarkable intact and cohesive grouping, rivaled only by that of New York City, with fifty-seven.¹ Passyunk Branch was designed by well-known architect John T. Windrim, who went on to design two more branch library buildings and to

¹ Carnegie provided funding beginning in 1903 for thirty branch libraries, but with rising construction costs, only twenty-five could be built. Of Philadelphia's twenty-five libraries, four are no longer extant and a fifth (Frankford) has been greatly altered. Four others are no longer used as library buildings. In New York, fifty-seven were still standing, and fifty-four still operating as libraries as of the 1996 publication of *The Architecture of Literacy; The Carnegie Libraries of New York City* by Mary B. Dierickx. The next single largest grants for branch libraries were given to Cleveland (15), Baltimore (14), and Cincinnati (10).

serve on the Library Board. It is among the smaller and less elaborate of the libraries, yet it is a classic example of the somewhat staid Beaux Arts form that came to define Carnegie branch libraries. It follows the usual plan to consist of a rectangular main block with a rear ell to create a T-shaped configuration. The lot on which the Passyunk Branch sits was provided to the city of Philadelphia by the estate of national renowned Philadelphia merchant, banker, and philanthropist, Stephan Girard. Girard established a working farm here on what was then the countryside. His former residence stills occupies a plot of land a short distance from the library that serves as a city park.

Historian: Catherine C. Lavoie

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: The Passyunk Branch was built between 1912 and 1914. The building date of 1913 appears on the dedication plaque located in the in entry vestibule of the library, which is presumably the year in which the cornerstone was laid. According to a "Report of the Librarian," John Thomson, the proposal from the estate of Stephen Girard to lease a 173' by 135' section of the Girard estate land (located at the corner of Shunk and 20th streets) for 99 years was approved by Mr. Carnegie in April 1911. The architect's plans were approved in June 1912 and a construction contract was signed in July.² By June of the following year, the minutes report that the building was rapidly nearing completion. Despite that report, the library did not hold its official opening until nearly a year later, on 21 April 1914.

2. Architect: The architect for the Passyunk Branch Library was John Torrey Windrim (1866-1934). John T. Windrim and his father, James Hamilton Windrim, enjoyed a successful architectural practice in Philadelphia designing commercial, public, and municipal buildings. The senior Windrim was among the first graduating class of Girard College and in 1871 was appointed architect for the Girard Estate by the Board of City Trusts, a position that his son later assumed. As was common practice at the time, James Windrim learned his craft through an apprenticeship, with respected Philadelphia architect John Notman. Similarly, John Torey Windrim studied architecture under his father's direction, beginning in 1882. Between 1889 and 1891, James Windrim served as Supervising Architect of the U.S. Treasury, and from 1892 to 1895, as the Director of Public Works for the City of Philadelphia. John T. Windrim thus assumed control of the Windrim firm at a fairly early age (although his father returned to the practice in 1895). Among the buildings for which father and son are best known are those designed for local corporations such as the Philadelphia Electric Company and the Bell Telephone Company. Similar to the concept of branch libraries, John T. Windrim designed

² Free Library of Philadelphia, *Report of the Librarian*, June 1912, p. 18 Passyunk – plans complete, specs prepared, hope to start in early July.

neighborhood sub-stations for these companies, along with their large central facilities and headquarters buildings. Structures like the Chester Power Station, the Franklin Institute, and the Philadelphia Municipal Court were monumental in scale and classically derived Beaux Arts in style. The high visibility of projects such as these established their reputation as probably the best known practitioners of the Beaux Arts in the city.³

Beyond his skill as an architect, John T. Windrim was influential and well-connected, belonging to the American Institute of Architects, the Architectural League of New York, the Philadelphia Arts Club, the Union League, and the American Institute of Banking. He also served on corporate boards for companies such as the Evening Telegraph Company, Provident Trust, Philadelphia Electric Company, and even the Free Library of Philadelphia towards the end of its branch library building campaign.⁴

Generally speaking, the list of architects for Philadelphia's branch libraries is comprised of local notables as well as up-and-coming architects; only two were not Philadelphia based, Carnegie Corporation Secretary Bertram's own architectural advisors Edward L. Tilton (Richmond Branch, 1908) and Henry D. Whitfield (Wissahickon, 1909).⁵ The minutes periodically indicate when suggestions of architects were made and by whom, and also indicate their inclusion to the approved list.⁶ In the case of John T. Windrim, his experience designing municipal architecture made him a natural choice as an architect for a branch library. Windrim contributed to the design and construction of the branch libraries perhaps more than any other architect in the city. Windrim designed three branch libraries beginning with Passyunk in 1912. Passyunk was followed by the Nicetown (no longer extant) and Logan branches, built between 1916 and 1918. During the concluding stages of the branch library building campaign, and after designing three branch libraries, John T. Windrim was asked to sit on the Board of Trustees for the Free Library.

As a member of the Board of Trustees for the Free Library, Windrim was given oversight of the construction of the last of the branch libraries, and was the only architect to serve in that capacity. The choice was evidently made early on that librarians—and not architects—would oversee the Carnegie funded building campaign. This reflects the ongoing battle between the two disciplines in a librarian-versus-architect struggle over who was best qualified to control the process. Carnegie's secretary in charge of the library funding, James Bertram, was of the opinion that librarians were better equipped

³ Roger Moss and Sandra Tatman, *Biographical Dictionary of Philadelphia Architects* (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1985), 871-877; and American Architects and Buildings database, biography, Windrim, John Torrey, www.philadelphiabuildings.org/pab/app/ar_display.cfm/21563.

⁴ Moss and Tatman, 873-874.

⁵ Free Library of Philadelphia, Carnegie Fund Committee, Minutes, 25 November 1904. A letter was received from Henry D. Whitfield, and a motion was made to submit his name to the Board as architect of the "Pencoyd Iron Works Branch" [properly named Wissahickon]; same for Edward L. Tilton, to be referred for next branch.

⁶ *Ibid*, 27 May 1905, "motion that these be added to list to design branches: Benjamin A. Stevens, Louis Baker of Baker and Dallett, Wilson Eyre, Edgar V. Seeler, David Knickerbacker Boyd, Francis G. Caldwell." Of these, Stevens, Eyre and Boyd received commissions for Manayunk, McPherson Square, and Southwark, respectively.

because their focus was on efficient use of space, while architects tended to waste money on superfluous architectural details. During the early period of library development that occurred during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, librarians controlled the space, and access to the books was restricted. Likewise, architectural designs were more elaborate, looking much like the estate homes of their benefactors. Fueled by Carnegie interest and Carnegie money however, great strides were made in the area of library science as the focus turned to efficiency. Thus, libraries transitioned from controlled environments to ones in which the patron had relative free access to library materials.

Windrim was asked to take control of the process during a period in the Philadelphia library building campaign when funds were dwindling at the same time that construction costs were skyrocketing. His expertise was evidently needed to keep both the architects and the contractors in line. A good indicator of what was to come is Windrim's own design for the Logan Branch, begun in 1917. While the building is of decent size and dignified design, Windrim took a minimalist approach to marking out its architectural detailing. This was a function of cost, as he was forced to go repeatedly back to the drawing board in an effort to further reduce expenses. It was at this point that Windrim was asked to select and review the work of the remaining architects, one of whom was an architect for the city.⁷

3. Owners: The library is part of the Free Library of Philadelphia system and is owned by the City of Philadelphia. The land for the library was provided by the estate of Stephen Girard and represented a small portion of his former working farm south of the city, the house for which still stands, now in a small city park, not far from the library.

4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: The contract for the construction of the Passyunk Branch went to low-bidder, Pomeroy Construction Company at a cost of \$32,200.⁸

5. Original plans and construction: On 22 June 1911, the Library Board "resolved that the plans for the Passyunk Branch prepared by Mr. John T. Windrim be approved subject to such alterations as may be agreed upon between the President, Librarian, Asst. Librarian, and the architect."⁹ The reference to alterations was evidently an attempt to reduce the size, and perhaps other specifications, of the planned library in order to avoid exceeding the original budget of \$40,000. However, by 23 November it was determined that they should move forward with the original plans regardless. Thus the architect was given the

⁷ Ibid, 6 March 1923. The following is given in evidence: "Mr. John T. Windrim, a member of the Board of Trustees, had been asked to recommend an architect." In this instance, Windrim chose Edmund Gilchrist as architect for Cobbs Creek.

⁸ Free Library of Philadelphia, Board of Trustees, Minute Book, Vol 2. July 25, 1912, p. 236. "The bids for the general contract of the Passyunk Branch were considered by the Board, and as Mr. Windrim, the architect, expressed satisfaction with the Pomeroy Construction company as proper contractors for the purpose, and they being the lowest bidders, the contract was awarded to them for the general contract and the curbing estimate, in the sum of \$32,200."

⁹ Free Library of Philadelphia, Carnegie Fund Committee, Minutes, June 22, 1911 Present Mr. Woodruff, Dr. Pepper, Mr. Ashhurst, Mr. Thomson.

go-ahead to solicit two construction bids for a structure erected of either “grey tapestry brick or the Sayre and Fisher hard brick.”¹⁰

The best evidence for the building’s appearance upon completion is the two photographs taken by well-known photographer William H. Rau for documentary purposes. From the exterior the building appeared much as it does today, but without the light standards that flanked the entryway. Likewise, the interior remains much as it was, with the notable exception of the addition of the painted murals and other decorative features, and the partitioning of a service area to one side of the main reading room. The interior photograph shows a large, open main reading room with a circulation desk and a balustrade for traffic control at the entry, and low shelving running front-to-back to either side of the desk to distinguish the two sections. As remains today, shelving is located along the walls in the main room and in the rear T-section. The room was lit by three large brass chandeliers which were supplemented by sconces with glass globes affixed to the shelving.

6. Alterations and additions: Passyunk, along with the rest of Philadelphia’s older branch libraries, was remodeled in the late 1950s. At that time, the systems were upgraded and new linoleum flooring and modern furniture were added, and a new circulation desk installed. The walls and woodwork were painted. Florescent lighting replaced the old brass chandeliers. A partition wall has also been added at the southeast end of the main reading room to create work space for library staff. In more recent years, decorative murals have been added to the library. In the children’s reading area, located to the northwest end of the main reading room, the walls above the shelving are ornamented by colorful wooden cut-outs in the form of animals and jungle vegetation. In the rear section, a large mural of the branches of a Sycamore tree with books hanging from them appear in the area above the door that joins the T section with the main reading room. In the basement, the long wall of the meeting room contains a mural that shows the interior of the library in use, with cameo appearances by Benjamin Franklin, Stephen Girard, and Andrew Carnegie. The staff kitchen was also upgraded (as were restrooms), but it retains its wood cabinet that has been painted.

B. Historical Context:

The Carnegie Funded Free Library of Philadelphia Building Campaign

On 3 January 1903, Carnegie’s secretary James Bertram responded to the Free Library of Philadelphia’s request for a grant to finance the construction of libraries with the promise of \$1.5 million for a planned thirty branch libraries. Despite the fact that Philadelphia figures quite prominently on the timeline of American Library history, it had no purpose-built public libraries prior to the Carnegie endowment. Philadelphia *did* have the nation’s first private subscription library, known as the Library Company, founded in 1731. Numerous other private libraries were created as well, such as the Mercantile Library, Ridgeway Library, and the library at the

¹⁰ Ibid, 23 November 1911, p. 10.

University of Pennsylvania. And it was in Philadelphia that the American Library Association was formed in 1876. The establishment of the Free Library in 1891 placed Philadelphia among the first American cities to institute a non-subscription public library system for the benefit of all of Philadelphia's citizens. As Library Board president J.G. Rosengarten stated in 1903, "Proprietary libraries have grown into valuable adjuncts to our other education institutions. None of them, however, serves the public as does the Free Library, providing good reading for our school children, for our industrious adult population, and for the city's useful employees, firemen, and telegraph operators."¹¹ As Rosengarten's comment indicates, the library system was an important component of the city's public education.

However, prior to the Carnegie funding, the city's fourteen branch libraries, each started by interested local communities, were dependent upon old mansions, storefronts, or back rooms of commercial buildings and civic institutions for library space. As Rosengarten points out, "The [Carnegie] gift gave welcome relief from the expense of the rented rooms occupied by the branches, and from much of the risk to which the collections were subjected in these temporary quarters."¹² Likewise, prior to the completion of its permanent home in 1927, the Central Branch of the Free Library was housed within three different preexisting buildings, including City Hall, an abandoned concert hall on Chestnut Street, and a building at the northeast corner of 13th and Locust streets. Carnegie's \$1.5 million grant would change all that. Beginning in 1905, the endowment was put to work, paying for the design and construction of twenty-five branch libraries throughout the city (three of which are no longer extant). They were built between 1905 and 1930, with the bulk of them constructed by 1917, and designed by a wide range of Philadelphia architects.

Philadelphia was just one of many cities to receive a library grant. Andrew Carnegie provided forty million dollars for the construction of over 1,600 libraries throughout the United States during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (and about 400 more abroad). Carnegie was motivated by both his own immigrant experience and by his social/political beliefs. Despite his poor, working-class upbringing, he made a fortune through the production of steel. Believing that the wealthy were obligated to give back to society, Carnegie set out to spend during his lifetime the entire 400 million dollars that he received through the sale of Carnegie Steel Company. Carnegie also believed that given a good work ethic and the proper tools, anyone could be successful. He was self-taught and credited his success to the access he received to one gentleman's private library. Carnegie came to believe in the power of libraries to create an egalitarian society that favored hard work over social privilege. Hence libraries, as a key to learning and socialization, became a focus of his charitable donations.

While Carnegie's motivations were in large part paternalistic, the impact of his library campaign is far greater than merely providing the working class with access to books. The vast resources that he applied to this area lead to great advances in library science as well as to the development of the American Library as a building type. Carnegie applied the corporate business models that had made him successful as an industrialist to the development and production of libraries. He

¹¹ Theodore Wesley Koch, *A Book of Carnegie Libraries* (New York: The H.W. Wilson Company, 1917), 85.

¹² Ibid.

insured that local municipalities had a stake in their libraries by insisting that they supply the building site and the books, as well as ten percent of the total construction cost annually for maintenance. By so doing, Carnegie took libraries from the arena of private philanthropy to that of civic responsibility. Any town that was willing to meet those terms was basically able to receive grant funding. The process began via a letter of application submitted to Andrew Carnegie's personal secretary and the individual charged with management of the library grants, James Bertram. In 1903 the city of Philadelphia did just that.

Unlike its rival New York City, Philadelphia's planning group, the Carnegie Fund Committee, placed librarians and not architects at the forefront of the planning process. This is likely the primary reason for the relative standardization of Philadelphia's branch libraries, particularly with regard to layout. This important decision on the part of the Library Board was in keeping with the sentiments endorsed by the Carnegie Corporation. James Bertram was generally distrustful of architects as library planners, believing that they tended to make libraries too expensive by adding unusable space and superfluous detail merely for affect. He preferred the advice of librarians who better understood how libraries needed to function. Both the Philadelphia Library Board and Carnegie Fund Committee included well-placed librarians, the former being Pennsylvania State Librarian and American Library Association representative Thomas L. Montgomery, and the latter, librarian of the Free Library, John Thomson. President of the Board of Education Henry R. Edmunds was also on the Committee, an indication of the significance of the libraries to public education in Philadelphia. Prominent local businessmen and attorneys filled the other positions. As the Committee minutes indicate, the Librarian and Assistant Librarian were left to work out the details with the architects, and generally had the last say when it came to finalizing the plans.¹³ (For more information about the Carnegie Library construction program and the Free Library of Philadelphia's own library building campaign see, Free Library of Philadelphia, Central Branch, HABS No. PA-6749, Historical Context section.)

The Passyunk Branch of the Free Library of Philadelphia

Passyunk was the fifteenth branch of the Philadelphia Free Library to open its doors, on 21 April 1914. Built at the height of the construction campaign, it was one of seven branches concurrently under construction, and one of fifteen constructed in the decade between 1909 and 1919. Passyunk typifies the branch buildings erected for the Philadelphia Free Library system with funds from the Carnegie Corporation through its use of the T-shaped plan and Beaux Arts styling. It is also significant as the first of three branches designed by noted Philadelphia architect John T. Windrim. He and Phillip H. Johnson were the only architects to design more than one branch library and, in fact, they each designed three. While no written guidelines are extant, it is evident that the initial plan of the Carnegie Fund Committee was to select a different

¹³ Free Library of Philadelphia, Board of Trustees, Minutes, 1 July 1904. "On motion resolved, that the matter of procuring plans and securing bids be referred to the Carnegie Fund Committee with power." And also, Carnegie Fund Committee Minutes, 17 May 1912. An entry from this meeting (one of many) illustrates that practices: "Mr. Richards [architect] be instructed to prepare plans for the proposed new Paschalville Branch and that the President be authorized to approve plans for such Branch when same were agreed upon by himself, the Librarian, Asst. Librarian and the architect."

architect for each library. However, as funding dwindled towards the end of the building campaign, Windrim and Johnson were called upon to design five of the remaining six branches. As an architect for the City of Philadelphia, Johnson was already on the payroll and had experience designing institutional building forms. Windrim had equal experience and also exhibited a preference for the Beaux Arts style popularly used in the design of libraries and other civic buildings of the period.

The parcel of land on which the Passyunk Branch Library was erected was provided by the Estate of Stephen Girard and represents a small portion of his former working farm. Girard's farmhouse, located on the southern outskirts of the city when built, still stands on what is now a small city park within this urban neighborhood, just a few blocks from the library. As a successful merchant, shipping entrepreneur, and banker, Girard became the wealthiest man in the colonies and eventually he turned to philanthropy. His generosity extended into many areas and is still felt today. He is perhaps best remembered for helping the federal government to finance the War of 1812 and for financing the establishment of the well-known Girard College for Orphan Boys. In addition to the opulent boarding school, the boys were also permitted to avail themselves of Girard's farm property. The neighborhood later became known as "Girard Estates," named for its benefactor.¹⁴

Approval for the use of the Girard site as the location of a branch library was given in April 1911. It was over a year later, in June 1912, that plans for the library prepared by John T. Windrim were tentatively approved by the Carnegie Fund Committee, subject to review by the president of the Library Board, the Librarian, and Assistant Librarian of the Free Library.¹⁵ Final approval was delayed pending a decision as to whether or not the size of the structure should be reduced. By November it was decided that the building should proceed as planned despite the fact that construction would likely exceed projected costs. Perhaps as a result of budgetary constraints, the Passyunk Branch Library is dignified yet somewhat staid in its architectural detailing, both inside and out.

Once the plans were approved, Windrim was instructed to obtain two construction bids to include as a building material either "grey tapestry brick or the Sayre and Fisher hard brick" as suggested in his earlier correspondence.¹⁶ On July 25, 1912 a contract was awarded to the low-bidder, the Pomeroy Construction Company, at a cost of \$32,200. The Annual Report of the Free Library for 1912 optimistically reported that the Passyunk Branch would be "placed into

¹⁴ Girard Estates, is part of South Philadelphia and is bound by Passyunk Avenue on the north to the south side of Shunk St. on the south, the west side of Broad Street on the east and 22nd Street on the West.

¹⁵ Free Library of Philadelphia, Carnegie Fund Committee, Minutes, June 22, 1911. "On Motion resolved that the plans for the Passyunk Branch prepared by Mr. John T. Windrim be approved subject to such alterations as may be agreed upon between the President, Librarian, Asst. Librarian, and the architect.

¹⁶ Ibid, Minutes 23 November 1911, p. 10. "The plans for the Passyunk Branch were considered and it was decided not to reduce the building in size, although the cost would exceed \$40,000. The Librarian was directed to instruct the architect to obtain two bids covering the usage of either grey tapestry brick or the Sayre and Fisher hard brick, as reported by Mr. Windrim in his letter dated November 7, 1911."

service this year.”¹⁷ As indicated by the dedication plaque located in the entry vestibule, as well as further minutes of the Carnegie Fund Committee and the Annual Reports, the building was largely constructed in 1913. Despite the fact that the completion photographs taken by William H. Rau appear in the Annual Report for 1913, the official opening of the library did not occurred until April 21, 1914.¹⁸ The Passyunk, Southwark, Falls of Schuylkill, and South Philadelphia branches all opened within a year of each other, while at the same time, ground was breaking on the Paschalville and Haddington branches, and preliminary drawings were underway for those at Nicetown and McPherson Square.

At the same time that Windrim was creating the plans for the Passyunk Branch Library he was also designing the duplex houses that now surround it. In fact, it is not unlikely that Windrim’s position as the architect of the Girard Estate factored into the decision to appoint him as architect for the nearby library. With regard to the housing, as a stipulation of Girard’s will, his farm known as “Gentilhomme” was not to be sold. For this reason the Board of City Trusts and the Girard Estate decided to build a total of 481 rental units, known as the Girard Estate Homes, to help fund the continued maintenance of the farm estate as well as Girard College for Orphaned Boys. Between 1906 and 1916 Windrim designed at least seventy-six of these duplexes in a mix of Colonial Revival styles to include Spanish Mission, Craftsmen bungalows, and even English Jacobean influenced designs.¹⁹ Succeeding his father, James H. Windrim as the architect for the Girard Estate, the junior Windrim undertook numerous other projects for the estate and in particular, Girard College, beginning in 1906 and continuing through 1929. In 1950 permission was granted to sell the homes and within two years they were all privately owned.

The Passyunk name for the library is of Native American derivation. During the seventeenth century the area was owned by Swedes and represented the better part of the buildable, non-marshland south of the early city of Philadelphia. Fronting on the Schuylkill River from Point Breeze up to Pinneys Creek, the area became a township during a very early period. It was, however, not very densely populated before the later part of the nineteenth century. It was traversed by the Federal Road (later Federal Street) that ran from the Delaware to Grays Ferry, and by a portion of the Moyamensing Road. Like a large part of South Philadelphia, the current neighborhood residents are mostly Italian Americans, with Irish Americans forming the second largest group. The Passyunk Branch was renamed the Thomas F. Donatucci, Sr. Branch on 23 April 2004 in honor of the lifetime resident and community leader. Mr. Donatucci held positions as the chairman and community leader of the 26th Ward, actively serving the district from the 1930s until his death in 1970. More recently the decision was made to paint the elaborate interior murals that now call attention to the Passyunk Branch Library. Its clean lines, symmetry, and subdued classical details provide a backdrop for a variety of jovial scenes that range from

¹⁷ The Free Library of Philadelphia, *17th Annual Report* (1912), p.25, Branches. “Work accomplished in plans for new branches, six new branches to be placed in service this year (Falls of Schuylkill – Warden Dr and Midvale Ave; South Philadelphia – Broad & Ritner; Passyunk – 20th & Shunk; Paschalville – 70th & Woodland; Haddington – 65th & Girard).

¹⁸ Ibid, 19th Annual Report, 1914, p. 25 Passyunk opened on April 21, 1914.

¹⁹ Moss, 875. According to the list projects, Windrim designed 76 residences for the Girard Estate, and 18th & Shunk streets in 1910. Numerous other projects are listed for either the Girard Estate or Girard College between 1906 and 1929.

book-sprouting trees to cameo appearances by none other than library benefactors Stephen Girard, Benjamin Franklin, and Andrew Carnegie.²⁰

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The Passyunk Branch library is typical of Carnegie libraries in general, and the Free Library of Philadelphia branches in particular. It is a single story in height, resting on a raised basement, and is Beaux Arts in its architectural styling. The library is seven bays across by three bays deep, with a perpendicular rear wing, four-bays-by-three-bays, to create an overall T-shaped building configuration. To the center of the front façade is an entry pavilion/vestibule with a classically inspired frontispiece featuring fluted Ionic columns supporting an entablature. Between each typical tripartite window is a plain brick pilaster with a stone capital in triglyph-and-methope pattern. This latter feature joins to create a stone frieze that encircles the library. The interior consists of an open plan bisected by the circulation desk and by low shelving.

2. Condition of fabric: The library appears to be well maintained and in good condition.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The library forms a T-shaped configuration, with the main block extending seven bays across and three bays deep, and the rear ell being four bays deep.

2. Foundations: The foundations are presumably of stone.

3. Walls: The walls are of a buff-color brick laid in Flemish bond with brick spandrels in a diaper pattern. Decorative elements include terra cotta window sills, water table, and frieze. The columns and steps at the front entryway are of stone.

4. Structural systems, framing: The building is of load-bearing masonry construction.

5. Porches, stoops: There is a wide stone stoop to the front the library that facilitates access to the front entrance. Steps are flanked by low brick walls with a stone cap, and extend past the walls to wrap around the outer edges. Large planters now flank the entrance, sitting on the walls in the location formerly occupied by light stanchions.

6. Chimneys: A chimney stack is located to the rear of the building, at the crux of the main block and rear ell section.

7. Openings:

²⁰ Girard provided the building lot and Carnegie, the funds for the construction of the library building. Benjamin Franklin is credited with starting Philadelphia's first library, the Library Company, in 1731.

a. Doorways and doors: The principal doorway is to the center of southwest front façade where an entry pavilion is formed. Immediately surrounding the double doors is a shouldered surround with a simple entablature with dentils and egg-and-dart molding. Between these two elements is a plaque inscribed with the new name of the library, covering the original stone inscription, "PASSYUNK BRANCH." Flanking the doorway are fluted Ionic columns that support an entablature in a triglyph-and-methope pattern. Above is a stone panel in which it is inscribed "THE FREE LIBRARY OF PHILADELPHIA" and capped with egg-and-dart molding. There are two secondary doorways that lead to the basement. The first is located in a stairwell to the southern side of the front façade; the second is located to the northwest side of the rear wing where it meets the main block. It has a metal double door with a transom, and a decorative brick surround and a stone stoop.

b. Windows and shutters: The typical window is divided by mullions to form a tripartite arrangement. A lintel is formed of bricks stacked on end, with diagonal brick corner blocks and is edged along the sides with horizontally stacked bricks. A row of narrow bricks on end provides a decorative ribbon between the bays and the pilasters. The window surrounds culminate at the bottom in a coved terra cotta sill. Below each window are bricks placed on end to frame a spandrel. Below each primary window (and the terra cotta water table) is a corresponding basement window. Many of these have been filled in with glass block.

8. Roof:

a. Shape, covering: The roof appears to form a low pyramidal shape (inaccessible). There is a decorative frieze and a dentilled cornice with a plain brick parapet rising above.

b. Cornice, eaves: The library has a dentilled cornice.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: The Passyunk library is entered through a vestibule, the interior of which is flanked by stone dedication plaques, one crediting the building to Andrew Carnegie and the other, crediting the land to (the will of) Stephen Girard. The interior of the library consists of an open space bisected by the circulation desk to the front and center and low shelving to either side. Built-in shelving lines the walls on all sides. An area has been partitioned off to create a work room for staff to one side of the main reading room. The circulation desk is located to the center of the main reading room, near the front entry; free standing librarian's desks appear in other locations. The children's reading room is located to the northwest end of the main reading room, and the adult section—including fiction and new books—is located in to the southeast. In the rear section is located books of non-fiction and computers for public use. There is a double doorway to

a stairway that leads to a ground-level exit (at the landing) and to the basement. The basement includes a central hall with a large meeting room to the front of the building, a boiler room to one side, and a staff lounge and kitchen, work rooms and rest rooms to the other side. The staff kitchen retains its original wood cabinet, which has been painted. The long wall of the meeting room contains a mural that depicts the interior of the library with cameo appearances by benefactors Benjamin Franklin, Stephen Girard, and Andrew Carnegie.

2. Stairways: Double doors lead to the stairway that is located to the northwest side of the rear section, close to the main reading room. A straight run stair leads to a landing with an exterior exit and a second run turns 180 degrees to continue to the basement.

3. Flooring: The original wood flooring on the first floor has been covered with industrial grade carpeting, and there is linoleum tile flooring on the basement level, and a tile floor in the entry vestibule.

4. Wall and ceiling finish: The walls are of plaster painted a peach color. There are no ornamental window or door surrounds, cornices or frieze moldings of any type. The ceiling is a low vault with shallow molding to form a simple geometric outline, and there are coffered skylights to the center of the main reading room and the rear T-section. A number of walls are currently ornamented by wood cut-outs and painted murals. In the children's reading room, the walls above the shelving are ornamented by colorful wooden cut-outs in the form of animals and jungle vegetation. In the adult reading section, a large mural depicting the branches of a Sycamore tree with books hanging from them appears in the area above the door that joins the T section with the main reading room.

5. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: The doorways are surrounded by a simple, narrow casing. There are double paneled doors, with glass lights forming the upper panel, that open from the entry vestibule into the library proper.

b. Windows: The interior windows are recessed within an unframed reveal.

6. Shelving: Full-height shelving line the walls and rest on a high plinth.

7. Mechanical equipment:

a. Heating: The ducts for the heating and air-conditioning system run below the built-in shelving that lines the walls, hidden within the plinth.

b. Lighting: Half-dome opaque white glass light fixtures hang from those sections of the ceiling located along the center and two flanking areas (with the

exception of those sections that house the skylights). They replace the three original brass chandeliers and sconces mounted on the bookcases.

c. Plumbing: The library includes restroom and kitchen facilities in the basement.

D. Site: The library faces southwest onto Shunk Street, which is a quiet, tree-lined residential street. It is located in a neighborhood of largely semi-detached duplex homes in a broad array of Colonial Revival styles. The property was original part of Stephen Girard's country estate; Girard's farmhouse and two dependencies sit within a small park located just down the street from the library.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Early views: Free Library of Philadelphia, *Annual Report of the Library Board, 1913*, William H. Rau, photographs.

B. Bibliography:

1. Primary sources: The records of the Free Library of Philadelphia are located at the Central Library on Vine Street. The *Annual Reports* are located in the Municipal Reference Division, Cities P53-1154; and the Carnegie Fund Committee Minute Books are located in the Director's Vault (access by special permission).

The Free Library of Philadelphia, *17th Annual Report*, 1912.

Ibid, *19th Annual Report*, 1914

Ibid, *Report of the Librarian*, June 1912.

Ibid, Carnegie Fund Committee, Minutes, 1911-1914.

2. Secondary sources:

Bobinski, George S. *Carnegie Libraries: Their History and Impact on American Public Library Development*. Chicago: American Library Association, 1969.

Dierickx, Mary B. *The Architecture of Literacy; The Carnegie Libraries of New York City*. New York City: The Cooper Union for the Advancement of Art and Science & NYC Department of General Services, September 1996.

Koch, Theodore Wesley. *A Book of Carnegie Libraries*. New York: The H.W. Wilson Company, 1917.

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PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The documentation of the Passyunk Branch Library was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) of the Heritage Documentation Programs of the National Park Service, Richard O'Connor, Chief during summer 2007 as part of a larger initiative to record the Carnegie Funded branch libraries of the Free Library of Philadelphia. The project is sponsored by HABS in cooperation with the Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia, John A. Gallery, director; and the Free Library of Philadelphia, William J. Fleming, Administrative Services Director, and made possible through a Congressional appropriation for recording in Southeastern Pennsylvania. The historical reports were prepared by Lisa P. Davidson and Catherine C. Lavoie. Large-format photography was undertaken for HABS by Joseph Elliott. Measured drawings were prepared of the Thomas Holme Branch as the typical branch library during the summer 2008. The drawings team was led by Robert Arzola, working with Jason McNatt, Paul Davidson, and Ann Kidd, architectural technicians.